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Friends, Society of. Yearly Meeting of 1843.

A

BRIEF STATEMENT

OF THE

RISE AND PROGRESS

OF THE TESTIMONY OF THE

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS,

AGAINST

SLAVERY AND THE SLAVE TRADE.

Published by direction of the Yearly Meeting, held in
Philadelphia, in the Fourth month, 1843.

PHILADELPHIA:

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*At a Yearly Meeting held in Philadelphia, by adjournments
from the 17th of the Fourth month to the 22nd of the same,
inclusive, 1843.*

A history of the rise and spread of a religious concern among Friends in this country, on account of holding their fellow men in bondage, and showing its progress in meetings and among the members, until slavery was abolished within the Society, by the persevering efforts of indefatigable labourers, having been prepared by the Meeting for Sufferings, it was read and approved; and that meeting directed to have such an edition printed as they may deem expedient; and circulate the work among our members and others.

Extracted from the Minutes,

WILLIAM EVANS,

Clerk to the Meeting this year.

INTRODUCTION.

It was intended to include in the following pages, an account of the labours of Friends, in all the Yearly Meetings where slavery once existed, to induce the members to set their slaves free; and letters were accordingly addressed with a view of procuring the information necessary for drawing up such a sketch. From two of the Yearly Meetings, however, the information could not be obtained; as the documents in relation to the subject were so circumstanced, as not to be readily accessible. It is believed, however, that the means used in the limits of those meetings to convince the understandings of the members of the iniquity of slave holding, and to induce them to give the negro the enjoyment of his natural right to liberty, were essentially the same as those detailed in the subsequent narrative.

It is obvious, that in so brief a space as this essay affords, a very imperfect view of the arduous and unwearied labours of the Society in the cause of freedom could be given; but perhaps enough is said to show the benefit of patient, persevering labour, under the influence of gospel love, in checking, and finally eradicating an evil, which long-established custom had sanctioned, and which was interwoven with all the social relations, and with the strongest feelings of self interest. Should it happily be the means of inciting others to pursue the same course in reference to slavery, the object of its publication will be obtained.

A

BRIEF STATEMENT, &c.

IT having pleased the Great Head of the Church to enlighten the minds of some of our early Friends to see the iniquity of holding their fellow men in bondage, at a time when many of our members were themselves slaveholders ; and the Society of Friends having been, through faithfulness, favoured to clear itself of that opprobrium of the Christian world, we have thought that a narrative of the steps by which this reformation was effected, would be both strengthening to those who, being slaveholders, feel the awfulness of their responsibility ; and encouraging to all as an example of patient perseverance in bearing a faithful testimony in the meekness and gentleness of the gospel, against the evils which are in the world.

At the time when the Society of Friends arose, there were great numbers of slaves in the British possessions, more especially in the West Indies, Virginia and the Carolinas. Many of their owners were among the early converts to our Society, and Friends who had emigrated thither from England, fell into the custom and purchased slaves.

We learn this from the earnest exhortations of George Fox and his fellow labourers to Friends to

treat their slaves with Christian care and humanity, and to prepare them for freedom.

Such was the counsel given by George Fox to Friends in Barbadoes in 1671.

“Respecting their negroes, I desired them,” says he in his journal, “to endeavour to train them up in the fear of God, as well those that were bought with their money, as them that were born in their families, that all might come to the knowledge of the Lord; that so with Joshua every master of a family might say, ‘As for me and my house we will serve the Lord.’ I desired also that they would cause their overseers to deal mildly and gently with their negroes, and not use cruelty towards them as the manner of some hath been and is; and that after certain years of servitude they should make them free.”

In a public discourse spoken in that island, he bears the following remarkable testimony: “let me tell you it will doubtless be very acceptable to the Lord, if so be that masters of families here, would deal so with their servants, the negroes and blacks whom they have bought with their money, [as] to let them go free after they have served faithfully a considerable term of years, be it thirty years after, more or less, and when they go and are made free, let them not go away empty handed.”

George Fox visited that island in company with Wm. Edmundson, and their earnest labours with the masters on behalf of the slaves, gave rise to a report that they were exciting the latter to revolt; a report which George Fox promptly pronounced to be a wicked slander. Four years afterwards, William Edmundson again visited the island; and the same slan-

ders being revived, he was taken before the governor, as appears by his journal.

It was probably during this second visit that he addressed an epistle to Friends of Maryland, Virginia, and other parts of America, which contains the following passage: "And must not negroes feel and partake the liberty of the gospel, that they may be won to the gospel? Is there no year of jubilee for them? Did not God make us all of one mould? And did not Jesus Christ shed his blood for us all? And what if they were of Ham's stock, and were to be servants of servants? hath not that been fulfilled upon them? and must that yoke always rest upon their bodies, or rather be laid upon Ham's spirit wherever it is? and doth not Christ take away that wall of partition between people and people? and is it not now that God is no respecter of persons, but of every nation, tongue and people, he that fears God and works righteousness shall find mercy? and should not we show forth the mercies and kindness of God to our fellow creatures? And doth not the prophet say the Lord will stretch forth his hand to Ethiopia, and will set up his altar in Egypt which David several times calls the land of Ham? And Christ's command is to do to others as we would have them to do to us; and which of you all would have the blacks or others to make you their slaves without hope or expectation of freedom or liberty? Would not this be an aggravation upon your minds that would outbalance all other comforts? So make their conditions your own; for a good conscience void of offence, is of more worth than all the world, and Truth must regulate all wrongs and wrong dealing."

These extracts prove that the sin of slaveholding was seen in its true light by some of the most eminent of our early Friends. That many bore a faithful testimony from that time forward, will be shown from the official records of the Society.

At the Yearly Meeting of Pennsylvania and New Jersey held in 1688, a paper was "presented by some German Friends concerning the lawfulness and unlawfulness of buying and keeping of negroes; it was adjudged not to be so proper for this meeting to give a positive judgment in the case, it having so general a relation to many other parts, and therefore at present they forbear it."

Diligent search has been made at various times for the paper spoken of in the above extract, and there is reason to fear that it is no longer extant. The German Friends who presented it are understood to have been emigrants from Kreisheim, who had established themselves in the neighbourhood of Germantown.

The first official step of the Society in regard to trading in negroes, appears to have been taken by the Yearly Meeting of 1696, which issued the following advice to its members. "Whereas, several papers have been read relating to the keeping and bringing in of negroes; which being duly considered, it is the advice of this meeting, that Friends be careful not to encourage the bringing in of any more negroes; and that such that have negroes, be careful of them, bring them to meetings, have meetings with them in their families, and restrain them from loose and lewd living as much as in them lies, and from rambling abroad on First-days or other times."

William Penn felt and mourned over the state of

the slaves, but his attempts to improve their condition by legal enactments were defeated in the House of Assembly. The following minute of the monthly meeting of Philadelphia made in 1700, bears witness to his zeal for their welfare. "Our dear Friend and governor having laid before this meeting a concern that hath laid upon his mind for some time concerning the negroes and Indians, that Friends ought to be very careful in discharging a good conscience towards them in all respects, but more especially for the good of their souls, and that they might as frequent as may be, come to meetings upon First-days, upon consideration whereof this meeting concludes to appoint a meeting for the negroes, to be kept once a month, &c., and that their masters give notice thereof in their own families, and be present with them at the said meetings as frequent as may be."

The quarterly meeting of Chester was at that time the most southern branch of the Yearly Meeting of Pennsylvania, and comprised all the meetings south of Philadelphia quarter, as far as Hopewell in Virginia. The attention of its members was early turned to this subject, and in the Sixth month, 1711, the following minute of that quarter was sent up to the Yearly Meeting.

"Chester monthly meeting's representatives reminded this meeting that their meeting was dissatisfied with Friends buying and encouraging the bringing in of negroes, and desires the care and notice of the Yearly Meeting; and the above particulars to be according to order, presented by the representatives of this meeting in writing to the next Yearly Meeting." The Yearly Meeting of that year notices this minute, and

adds, that “after a due consideration of the matter, the meeting considering that Friends in many other places are concerned in it as much as we are, advises that Friends may be careful, according to a former minute of this Yearly Meeting, (1696,) not to encourage the bringing in of any more; and that all merchants and factors write to their correspondents to discourage them from sending any more.”

In the following year, (1712,) the Yearly Meeting in its epistle to the London Yearly Meeting, expressed its concern on the subject of slavery, and pointed out the causes of the increase of slaves, in the following strong language. “And now dear Friends we impart unto you a concern that hath rested on our minds for many years, touching the importing and having negro slaves, and detaining them and their posterity as such, without any limitation or time of redemption from that condition. This matter was laid before this meeting many years ago, and the thing in some degree discouraged, as may appear by a minute of our Yearly Meeting, (1696,) desiring all merchants and traders professing Truth among us, to write to their correspondents, that they send no more negroes to be disposed of as above; yet notwithstanding, as our settlements increased, so other traders flocked in amongst us, over whom we had no gospel authority, and such have increased and multiplied negroes amongst us, to the grief of divers Friends, whom we are willing to ease, if the way might open clear to the satisfaction of the general; and it being last Yearly Meeting again moved, and Friends being more concerned with negroes in divers other provinces and places, than in these, we thought it too weighty to come to a full conclusion therein;

this meeting therefore desires your assistance by way of counsel and advice therein, and that you would be pleased to take the matter into your weighty consideration, after having advised with Friends in the other American provinces, and give us your sense or advice therein."

The tenor of the advice given may be learned from the epistle to London of the Yearly Meeting of 1714.

"We also kindly received your advice about negro slaves, and we are one with you that the multiplying of them may be of dangerous consequence, and therefore a law was made in Pennsylvania, laying a duty of twenty pounds upon every one imported there, which law the Queen was pleased to disannul. We could heartily wish that a way might be found to stop the bringing in more here; or at least, that Friends may be less concerned in buying or selling of any that may be brought in; and hope for your assistance with the government, if any farther law should be made, discouraging the importation. We know not of any Friend amongst us, that has any hand or concern in bringing any out of their own country; and we are of the same mind with you, that the practice is not commendable nor allowable amongst Friends; and we take the freedom to acquaint you, that our request unto you was, that you would be pleased to consult or advise with Friends in other plantations, where they are more numerous than with us; because they hold a correspondence with you but not with us, and your meeting may better prevail with them, and your advice prove more effectual."

"The subject was again introduced from the subordinate meetings into Chester quarterly meeting, in 1715,

and the following minute forwarded to the Yearly Meeting: "Chester monthly meeting having laid before this meeting that they are under a great concern at Friends being concerned in importing and buying of negroes, and do request the concurrence of this meeting with them, that Friends be not concerned in the importing and bringing of them; and Newark monthly meeting also requesting the discouraging of the same practice; this meeting taking the same into their serious and weighty consideration, it is the unanimous sense and judgment of this meeting, that Friends should not be concerned in the importing and bringing of negro slaves for the future; and that the same be laid before the next Yearly Meeting for their concurrence therein." All that the Yearly Meeting was able to do at this time is expressed in the following minute of that year, (1715): "If any Friends are concerned in the importation of negroes, let them be dealt with and advised to avoid that practice, according to the sense of former meetings in that behalf; and that all Friends who have or keep negroes, do use and treat them with humanity and with a Christian spirit; and that all do forbear judging or reflecting on one another, either in public or private, concerning the detaining or keeping them servants."

The Friends of Chester quarterly meeting, not resting easy under this minute, renewed their solicitations in the following year. By minute of Fourth month, 25th, 1716, Chester monthly meeting desires that the quarterly meeting will take into their further consideration, the buying and selling of negroes, which gives great encouragement for the bringing of them in: and that no Friends be found in the practice of buying any

that shall be imported hereafter." This minute was forwarded by the quarterly to the Yearly Meeting, where it met with but a cold reception, viz.

"As to the proposal from Chester meeting about negroes, there being no more in it than was proposed to the last Yearly Meeting, this meeting cannot see any better conclusion, than what was the judgment of the last meeting, and therefore do confirm the same; and yet in condescension to such Friends as are straitened in their minds against the holding them, it is desired, that Friends generally do, as much as may be, avoid buying such negroes as shall hereafter be brought in, rather than offend any Friends who are against it; yet this is only caution and not censure."

It thus appears that all that could at this time be gained, was to prohibit Friends from bringing in negroes from Africa or elsewhere, and to advise that they should not purchase such as were imported, and that they treat with humanity and in a Christian manner, those already in their possession.

The first step being thus taken, and the meeting not being prepared to go further, an interval of ten years occurs without any notice of the subject, but in which the sentiments of Friends appear to have been preparing for another advance in this righteous testimony.

In the Fifth month, 1729, the faithful Friends of Chester monthly meeting "offer to the quarterly meeting, that inasmuch as we are restricted by a rule of discipline from being concerned in fetching or importing negro slaves from their own country, whether it is not as reasonable we should be restricted from buying of them when imported; and if so, and the quarterly

meeting see meet, that it may be laid before the Yearly Meeting for their approbation and concurrence." The substance of this minute was adopted by the quarterly meeting, and sent to the Yearly Meeting of that year, (1729,) which deferred the consideration for one year, and in 1730, issued the following advice.

"The Friends of this meeting resuming the consideration of the proposition of Chester meeting, relating to the purchasing of such negroes as may hereafter be imported; and having reviewed and considered the former minutes relating thereto, and having maturely deliberated thereon, are now of opinion, that Friends ought to be very cautious of making any such purchases for the future, it being disagreeable to the sense of this meeting. And this meeting recommends it to the care of the several monthly meetings, to see that such who may be, or are likely to be found in that practice, may be admonished and cautioned how they offend herein."

This advice was renewed in 1735, and repeated annually thereafter (with the exception of 1740,) until 1743; and it appears that reports were annually sent up, stating the care of the subordinate meetings in these particulars.

From the minutes of several of the meetings, it appears that frequent labour was extended from this time forward, to induce those who were in the way of buying or of selling slaves, to cease from the practice.

In the First month, 1738, Haddonfield quarterly meeting directed the monthly meetings to make inquiry into, and to answer in their reports, the situation of their members, "respecting the buying and selling slaves."

In the Seventh month of that year, the monthly meetings reported that they were mostly clear of buying and selling slaves.

That this labour was not ineffectual, and that it was not confined to a single quarterly meeting, is apparent from the following minute.

“Divers Friends in this meeting,” says the Yearly Meeting of 1738, “expressed their satisfaction in finding by the reports of the quarterly meetings, that there is so little occasion of offence given by Friends concerning the encouraging the importing of negroes; and this meeting desires the care of Friends in their quarterly and monthly meetings, in this particular, may be continued.”

In the year 1743, the following query was adopted, and directed to be regularly answered :*

“11th. Do Friends observe the former advice of our Yearly Meeting, not to encourage the importation of negroes; nor to buy them after imported?”

* The meetings for discipline in the Society of Friends, are of four grades, Preparative, Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly. The first prepare the business for the Monthly Meetings, which may be considered the executive part of the Society; the Quarterly Meetings exercise a supervisory care over the Preparative and Monthly, which are subordinate to them, and the Yearly Meeting includes the whole; exercising a general care over all departments of the Society, and making all the rules for its government. The queries are answered by the inferior to the superior meetings, and relate to the due attendance of the members at meetings for Divine worship and for the transaction of the discipline; to the maintenance of love and unity; the proper religious and literary instruction of the children; the care of the poor; the observance of temperance, and of moderation in business, manner of living, &c.; the due support of discipline, and of the various Christian testimonies which the Society believes itself called to uphold. The answers to these queries are annually sent up to the Yearly Meeting, so as to place before that body the religious condition of all its subordinate branches.

In 1755, this query was thus modified :

“ 10th. Are Friends clear of importing or buying negroes ; and do they use those well which they are possessed of by inheritance or otherwise ; endeavouring to train them up in the principles of the Christian religion ?”

While the Society was thus clearing itself of the importing, and selling and purchasing of negroes, the concern was spreading on account of slavery itself, and Friends in various quarters, felt more and more deeply, its utter repugnance to the spirit of the gospel. Among the foremost of these were John Woolman and Anthony Benezet, whose writings a few years subsequent to this period, had so great an influence upon public sentiment. John Woolman's attention was more particularly turned to this subject in the year 1742, in consequence of being requested by his employer to write a bill of sale for a negro woman whom he had sold. The thought of writing an instrument of slavery for one of his fellow creatures was uneasy to him ; yet through weakness he yielded ; but at the execution of it was so afflicted in his mind, that he felt constrained in the presence of his employer and the purchaser, to declare his belief that slave keeping was a practice inconsistent with the Christian religion. From this time forward, he was a constant and earnest pleader with his brethren for the liberty of the slave.

In the year 1754, he published his *Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes*, which was widely and usefully circulated among Friends.

In the same year, an epistle to its members, the substance of which was sent up from Philadelphia

monthly meeting, and which is supposed to have been from the pen of Anthony Benezet, was issued by the Yearly Meeting. This paper shows the increasing hold which the subject had taken of the Society, and is a document well worthy of being again revived. It is as follows :

“Dear Friends. It hath frequently been the concern of our Yearly Meeting, to testify their uneasiness and disunity with the importation and purchasing of negroes and other slaves, and to direct the overseers of the several meetings, to advise and deal with such as engage therein ; and it hath likewise been the continued care of many weighty Friends, to press those that bear our name, to guard as much as possible, against being in any respect concerned in promoting the bondage of such unhappy people ; yet as we have with sorrow to observe, that their number is of late increased amongst us, we have thought proper to make our advice and judgment more public, that none may plead ignorance of our principles therein ; and also again earnestly exhort all, to avoid in any manner encouraging that practice, of making slaves of our fellow creatures.

“Now, dear Friends, if we continually bear in mind the royal law of ‘doing to others as we would be done by,’ we should never think of bereaving our fellow-creatures of that valuable blessing, liberty, nor endure to grow rich by their bondage. To live in ease and plenty, by the toil of those, whom violence and cruelty have put in our power, is neither consistent with Christianity nor common justice ; and we have good reason to believe, draws down the displeasure of heaven ; it being a melancholy, but true reflection, that where

slave keeping prevails, pure religion and sobriety decline; as it evidently tends to harden the heart, and render the soul less susceptible of that holy spirit of love, meekness and charity, which is the peculiar character of a true Christian. How then can we, who have been concerned to publish the gospel of universal love and peace among mankind, be so inconsistent with ourselves, as to purchase such who are prisoners of war, and thereby encourage this anti-Christian practice: and more especially as many of those poor creatures are stolen away, parents from children and children from parents; and others, who were in good circumstances in their native country, inhumanly torn from what they esteemed a happy situation, and compelled to toil in a state of slavery, too often extremely cruel. What dreadful scenes of murder and cruelty those barbarous ravages must occasion, in the country of those unhappy people, are too obvious to mention. Let us make their case our own, and consider what we should think, and how we should feel, were we in their circumstances. Remember our blessed Redeemer's positive command, 'to do unto others as we would have them to do unto us;' and that with what measure we meet, it shall be measured to us again. And we intreat all to examine, whether the purchasing of a negro, either born here, or imported, doth not contribute to a further importation, and consequently to the upholding all the evils above mentioned, and promoting man-stealing,—the only theft which by the Mosaic law was punished with death. 'He that stealeth a man and selleth him, or if he be found in his hands, he shall surely be put to death.'—Exod. xxi. 16.

“The characteristic and badge of a true Christian,

is love and good works. Our Saviour's whole life on earth, was one continued exercise of them. 'Love one another,' says he, 'as I have loved you.' How can we be said to love our brethren, who bring, or for selfish ends, keep them in bondage? Do we act consistent with this noble principle, who lay such heavy burthens on our fellow creatures? Do we consider that they are called, and sincerely desire that they may become heirs with us in glory; and rejoice in the liberty of the sons of God, whilst we are withholding from them the common liberties of mankind? Or can the Spirit of God, by which we have always professed to be led, be the author of those oppressive and unrighteous measures? Do we not thereby manifest, that temporal interest hath more influence on our conduct herein, than the dictates of that merciful, holy, and unerring Guide?

“And we likewise earnestly recommend to all who have slaves, to be careful to come up in the performance of their duty towards them; and to be particularly watchful over their own hearts; it being by sorrowful experience remarkable, that custom, and a familiarity with evil of any kind, have a tendency to bias the judgment, and deprave the mind; and it is obvious, that the future welfare of these poor slaves who are now in bondage, is generally too much disregarded by those who keep them. If their daily task of labour be but fulfilled, little else perhaps is thought of; nay, even that which in others would be looked upon with horror and detestation, is little regarded in them by their masters, such as the frequent separation of husbands from wives, and wives from husbands, whereby they are tempted to break their marriage

covenants and live in adultery, in direct opposition to the laws both of God and man. As we believe that Christ died for all men, without respect of persons; how fearful then ought we to be of engaging in what hath so natural a tendency to lessen our humanity, and of suffering ourselves to be inured to the exercise of hard and cruel measures, lest we thereby in any degree, lose our tender and feeling sense of the miseries of our fellow creatures, and become worse than those who have not believed.

“And dear Friends, you, who by inheritance, have slaves born in your families, we beseech you to consider them as souls committed to your trust, whom the Lord will require at your hands; and who, as well as you, are made partakers of the Spirit of Grace, and called to be heirs of salvation. Let it be your constant care to watch over them for good, instructing them in the fear of God, and the knowledge of the gospel of Christ, that they may answer the end of their creation, and God be glorified and honoured by them, as well as by us; and so train them up, that if you should come to behold their unhappy situation in the same light that many worthy men who are at rest have done, and many of your brethren now do, and should think it your duty to set them free, they may be the more capable to make a proper use of their liberty. Finally, brethren, we intreat you in the bowels of gospel love, seriously to weigh the cause of detaining them in bondage. If it be for your own private gain, or any other motive than their good, it is much to be feared, that the love of God and the influence of the Holy Spirit is not the prevailing principle in you, and that your hearts are not sufficiently redeemed from

the world; which that you, with ourselves, may more and more come to witness, through the cleansing virtue of the holy spirit of Jesus Christ, is our earnest desire."

The Yearly Meeting of the next year, (1755,) renewed its directions to the subordinate meetings, to treat with those who imported, and bought or sold slaves, by the following minute.

"The consideration of the inconsistency of the practice of being concerned in importing or buying slaves, with our Christian principles; being weightily revived and impressed, by very suitable advices and cautions given on the occasion, it is the sense and judgment of this meeting, that where any transgress this rule of our discipline, the overseers ought speedily to inform the monthly meeting of such transgressors, in order that the meeting may proceed to treat further with them, as they may be directed in the wisdom of Truth."

In the year 1758, it issued the following minute, which continued to be the rule of discipline on the subject, until 1776.

"After weighty consideration of the circumstances of Friends within the compass of this meeting, who have any negro or other slaves, the accounts and proposals now sent up from several quarters, and the rules of our discipline relative thereto; much time having been spent, and the sentiments of many Friends expressed, there appears an unanimous concern prevailing, to put a stop to the increase of the practice of importing, buying, selling, or keeping slaves for term of life; or purchasing them for such a number of years, as manifests that such purchasers, do only in terms, and not in fact, avoid the imputation of being keepers of slaves. This meeting very earnestly and affection-

ately intreats Friends, individually, to consider seriously the present circumstances of these and the adjacent provinces, which, by the permission of Divine Providence, have been visited with the desolating calamities of war and bloodshed, so that many of our fellow-subjects are now suffering in captivity; and fervently desires, that, excluding temporal considerations, or views of self-interest, we may manifest an humbling sense of these judgments, and in thankfulness for the peculiar favour extended and continued to our Friends and brethren in profession, none of whom have, as we have yet heard, been slain, nor carried into captivity, would steadily observe the injunction of our Lord and Master, 'To do unto others, as we would they should do unto us;' which it now appears to this meeting, would induce such Friends who have any slaves, to set them at liberty,—making a Christian provision for them, according to their ages, &c. And in order that Friends may be generally excited to the practice of this advice, some Friends here now signified to the meeting, their being so fully devoted to endeavour to render it effectual, that they are willing to visit and treat with all such Friends who have any slaves; the meeting therefore, approves of John Woolman, John Scarborough, John Sykes and Daniel Stanton undertaking that service; and desires some elders or other faithful Friends in each quarter, to accompany and assist them therein; and that they may proceed in the wisdom of Truth, and thereby be qualified to administer such advice as may be suitable to the circumstances of those they visit, and most effectual towards obtaining that purity, which it is evidently our duty to press after. And if after the sense and judgment of this meet-

ing, now given against every branch of this practice, any professing with us should persist to vindicate it, and be concerned in importing, selling or purchasing slaves, the respective monthly meetings to which they belong, should manifest their disunion with such persons, by refusing to permit them to sit in meetings for discipline, or to be employed in the affairs of Truth, or to receive from them any contribution towards the relief of the poor, or other services of the meeting. But if any cases of executors, guardians, trustees, or any others should happen, which may subject any such Friends to the necessity of being concerned with such slaves, and they are nevertheless willing to proceed according to the advice of the monthly meetings they belong to; wherever such cases happen, the monthly meetings are left to judge of the same in the wisdom of Truth, and, if necessary, to take the advice of the quarterly meeting therein."

The records of the Yearly Meeting show, that in almost every year during the interval from 1758 to 1776, the subject claimed the earnest and increasing care of the meeting. The subordinate meetings were exhorted to labour in Christian love and meekness with those who offended in this particular. From the year 1767, regular statements of this labour, and of the success which attended it, were forwarded to the Yearly Meeting, which repeatedly expressed its satisfaction with the care and concern thus manifested.

An examination of the minutes of the various quarterly and monthly meetings has shown that the attention of Friends was, from the year 1758, forward, steadily directed to the great point of convincing their fellow members who held slaves, of the cruelty and

injustice of so doing. It does not appear that many were disowned for purchasing and selling negroes. The forbearance, and yet earnestness of the course pursued, had the happier effect of inducing the greater number to abstain from doing either; and by the year 1774, the Yearly Meeting may be said to have cleared its members from dealing in slaves.

A considerable number had also been emancipated; yet still the holding of slaves was not a disownable offence, nor did a Friend bring himself under censure for transferring or accepting a slave, without a pecuniary consideration; although by the minute of 1758, the sense of the meeting had been so far expressed, as to declare that the slaveholder was not to be employed in the affairs of the Society.

Friends in various quarters were now no longer satisfied with this qualified disunity, and in 1774, requests were sent up from Philadelphia and Bucks quarterly meetings, soliciting a revision and explanation of the minute of 1758. In the Yearly Meeting itself, a concern appeared for the further promotion of our testimony against the iniquitous practice of depriving our fellow men of their natural right to liberty, as appears from the following minutes.

“A committee of thirty-four Friends was appointed to take this weighty subject under their consideration, and make report to a future sitting, of their sense and judgment of what additions or amendments are seasonable and necessary, at this time, to be made to the rule of discipline before mentioned; and any Friends who find a concern on their minds to deliver their sentiments to the said committee, have the consent of this meeting for so doing.

“Tenth month, 1st. The report of the committee

relating to our testimony against importing, buying, selling or keeping slaves, being now deliberately read and attentively considered; a calming, uniting spirit presiding, it is agreed to; and the quarterly and monthly meetings are earnestly recommended and enjoined to give due attention to the same, as the present sense and judgment of this meeting, being as follows, viz. :

“ Agreeable to appointment, we have weightily considered the sorrowful subject committed to us; and many brethren having had an opportunity of freely communicating their sentiments thereon; after a solid conference, we find there is a painful exercise attending the minds of Friends, and a general concern prevailing, that our Christian testimony may be more extensively held forth, against the unrighteous practice of enslaving our fellow creatures, to promote which, it is our sense and judgment,—

“ That such professors among us who are, or shall be concerned in importing, selling or purchasing; or that shall give away or transfer any negro or other slave, with or without any other consideration than to clear their estate of any future incumbrance, or in such manner as that their bondage is continued beyond the time limited by law or custom for white persons; and such member who accepts of such gift or assignment, ought to be speedily treated with, in the spirit of true love and wisdom, and the iniquity of their conduct laid before them. And if after this Christian labour, they cannot be brought to such a sense of their injustice, as to do every thing which the monthly meeting shall judge to be reasonable and necessary for the restoring such slave to his or her natural and just right to liberty,

and condemn their deviation from the law of righteousness and equity, to the satisfaction of the said meeting, that such member be testified against, as other transgressors are, by the rules of our discipline, for other immoral, unjust, and reproachful conduct.

“ And having deliberately weighed and considered that many slaves are possessed and detained in bondage by divers members of our religious Society, towards whom labour has been extended ; but being apprehensive that a Christian duty has not been so fully discharged to them as their various circumstances appear to require :

“ We think it expedient that the quarterly meetings should be earnestly advised and enjoined, to unite with their respective monthly meetings, in a speedy and close labour with such members ; and where it shall appear that any, from views of temporal gain, cannot be prevailed with to release from captivity such slaves as shall be found suitable for liberty, but detain them in bondage, without such reasons as shall be sufficient and satisfactory ; the cases of such should be brought forward to the next Yearly Meeting for consideration, and such further directions as may be judged expedient. And in the mean time, we think those persons ought not to be employed in the service of Truth.

“ And having grounds to conclude that there are some brethren who have these poor captives under their care, and are desirous to be wisely directed in the restoring them to liberty ; Friends who may be appointed by quarterly and monthly meetings on the service now proposed, are earnestly desired to give their weighty and solid attention for the assistance of such who are thus honestly and religiously concerned

for their own relief, and the essential benefit of the negro. And in such families where there are young ones, or others of suitable age, that they excite the masters, or those who have them, to give them sufficient instruction and learning, in order to qualify them for the enjoyment of the liberty intended, and that they be instructed by themselves, or placed out to such masters and mistresses who will be careful of their religious education, to serve for such time, and no longer, as is prescribed by law and custom, for white people.

“And understanding that some members of our religious Society through inattention, and others from different motives, have been induced to be concerned in hiring slaves on wages; such should be incited to consider, that this practice manifestly contributes to promote the unrighteous traffic we are desirous to suppress; and therefore they should be advised and admonished against being thus accessory to promoting it.

“Also that all Friends be cautioned and advised against acting as executors or administrators to such estates where slaves are bequeathed, or likely to be detained in bondage.

“And we are of the mind, that where any member has been heretofore so far excluded from religious fellowship, as the minute of this meeting, in the year 1758, gives authority; nevertheless, in case of further disorderly conduct, that they be treated with agreeable to our discipline.”

In the following year, (1775,) the increasing concern of the meeting displayed itself in the following minute.

“ On considering the progress made by the quarterly and monthly meetings, in promoting our testimony against keeping of slaves in bondage; it is satisfactory to observe, that by the labour therein since last year, a considerable number has been restored to liberty, and that Friends manifest a concern for further proceeding in this weighty service. This meeting, impressed with an earnest desire that it may be completed, and the church relieved from the grievous burthen under which we have long laboured, again recommends, that the united care and endeavours of Friends may be continued for perfecting it, agreeable to our solid sense and judgment, given and enjoined on the quarterly and monthly meetings concerning it last year.

“ And where any members manifest such a disregard to common justice, as to oppose and reject this Christian labour of their brethren, and Friends apprehend they have fully discharged their duty to them, that the particular circumstance of such cases be brought to this meeting, pursuant to the directions given in our minute of last year; as likewise such other cases which may be attended with so great difficulty, as to require the further advice and judgment of the body thereon.

“ And in order further to manifest our Christian care and regard to such of those poor people who have been restored to freedom, it is desired that a benevolent care may be exercised by Friends in their respective places, to assist and advise them, as their circumstances and stations in life may require, both for their spiritual and temporal good.”

When the usual reports from the quarterly meetings were read in the Yearly Meeting of 1776, a committee

was appointed to revise the accounts, and report to the meeting, "the most effectual religious means for perfecting a work which has long been the occasion of heavy labour to the faithful members of the church, and excited our desire to be fully clear of a practice so directly opposed to the law of righteousness." The committee made the following report, which was approved and confirmed by the meeting.

"We, the committee appointed to take under our consideration the deeply affecting case of our oppressed fellow men of the African race and others, as also the state of those who hold them in bondage, have several times met, and heard the concurring sentiments of divers other Friends, and examined the reports from the quarterly meetings, by which it appears, that much labour and care have been extended since the last year, for the convincement of such of our members who had, or yet have them in possession; many of whom have of late, from under hand and seal, properly discharged such as were in their possession, from a state of slavery.

"Yet sorrowful it is, that many there are in membership with us, who notwithstanding the labour bestowed, still continue to hold these people as slaves; under the consideration whereof, we are deeply affected, and united in judgment, that we are loudly called upon to a faithful obedience to the injunction of our blessed Lord, 'To do to all men as we would they should do unto us;' and to bear a full and clear testimony to these truths, that 'God is no respecter of persons,' and that 'Christ died for all men without distinction.' Which we earnestly and affectionately intreat may be duly considered in this awful and

alarming dispensation, and excite to impartial justice and judgment to black and white, rich and poor.

“ Under the calming influences of pure love, we do with great unanimity, give it as our sense and judgment, that quarterly and monthly meetings should speedily unite in a further close labour with all such as are slaveholders, and have any right of membership with us. And where any members continue to reject the advice of their brethren, and refuse to execute proper instruments of writing, for releasing from a state of slavery, such as are in their power, or to whom they have any claim, whether arrived to full age or in their minority, and no hopes of the continuance of Friends’ labour being profitable to them, that monthly meetings after having discharged a Christian duty to such, should testify their disunion with them.

“ And it appearing from the reports of the several quarters, that there are many difficult and complicated cases, which relate to those oppressed and much injured people, requiring great circumspection and close attention, in order that our religious testimony may be promoted, and that the cause of Truth may not suffer by unprofitable delays, we apprehend all such cases might well be submitted to the quarterly meetings where they subsist, whose advice and judgment should be observed and regarded; so that any member who refuses or declines complying therewith, after being laboured with in the spirit of love and wisdom, should be testified against.”

At this Yearly Meeting the following query was adopted in place of the one on the same subject, which had been directed in 1775. “ Are Friends clear of importing, purchasing, disposing of, or holding man-

kind as slaves? And do they use those well, who are set free, and necessarily under their care, and not in circumstances, through nonage or incapacity, to minister to their own necessities! And are they careful to educate and encourage them in a religious and virtuous life?"

The subordinate meetings upon the receipt of the foregoing minute, appointed committees to carry out the views of the Yearly Meeting. It is apparent from the tenor of their proceedings, that the principal portion of the labour had already been accomplished, and that the greater part of the slaves owned by our members had been set free.

The following extracts will fully justify this remark. In 1776, Philadelphia Monthly Meeting replies to the query, "that a considerable number of the slaves heretofore belonging to members of this meeting have been set at liberty." A committee of that monthly meeting had been labouring since 1774, with those who held slaves; and in 1777, report is made that *a few* continue to hold negroes in slavery. The minutes of that meeting, from the year 1756 to the year 1783, exhibit an unremitted attention to this subject, in labouring first with those who bought and sold, and next with those who kept, slaves. In 1778, seven members were disowned for the latter offence, and one in the following year. A much greater number emancipated their slaves, so that in 1781 there was but one case under care; and in 1783, the meeting reported that there were no slaves owned by its members.

In the Fourth month, 1777, Haddonfield Quarterly Meeting appointed "a committee to procure manumission papers, and assist the members of the monthly

meetings to manumit their slaves; and also to see to the education of coloured children." This committee continued under appointment for two years, and in the Ninth month, 1779, reported that they had fully complied with their appointment in obtaining manumissions. The names of the few who continued to hold slaves were reported, and directed to be transmitted to the monthly meetings, for them to enforce the discipline. In 1781, the quarterly meeting says: "It appears there has been a general releasement from bondage of the Africans among us, except in a few instances, where the women only are in membership."

Chester Quarterly Meeting, Eighth month, 1777, says, "the committee in the case of slaves reported to this meeting in writing, as follows, viz.: 'We the committee appointed to visit those that hold slaves, have attended to that service; and have visited all that had any claim over such within the verge of this meeting, that came to our knowledge; a considerable number of which have been manumitted since our appointment; but there are some members in several monthly meetings that still hold them, notwithstanding the many and repeated visits paid them; and we, as a committee, apprehend we have discharged our duty and appointment to such, and desire to be released; and we further think that the several cases may be safely recommended to the monthly meetings.'

Burlington Quarterly Meeting of the same date, (Eighth mo., 1777,) states that "Burlington Monthly Meeting further mentioned, that most of those who were in a state of slavery among them, have been manumitted since last year; and that in regard to those

remaining, viz. three of age, and five minors, there is reason to hope a little longer continuance of labour and patience, will have a good effect." Chesterfield adds to a report of a committee of that meeting on the subject of slaves, containing in substance, that they have had the satisfaction to find the hearts of divers Friends tender towards that poor, oppressed people, so that many have been manumitted; and yet a considerable number are continued in bondage; and though some members do not appear in a disposition to comply with the desire of Friends, yet having a tenderness towards them, they have a desire that their cases may be continued under care a further time.

Reports of the progress made in emancipation, appear on minute from time to time, and in the Eighth month, 1781, "Burlington adds to their report from their committee for the manumission of negroes, that they had attended to the service since last year, and had the satisfaction of getting clear of all the cases of this kind then known; but that three young negroes in a state of bondage had lately been discovered in one family, which had been and remain under their care. From the answers to the queries it appears that all the other monthly meetings are clear of slaves, except some remaining within the compass of Chesterfield and verge of one particular meeting."

At the same date, (Eighth mo. 1777,) the Western Quarter, which had been set off in 1758, from the south-western end of Chester, and which stretched far into Maryland, answers the query respecting slavery, in the following manner: "Clear of importing and disposing of mankind as slaves, also of purchasing, in all our meetings, except one, from which a doubt is

hinted in one case. Some within the compass of the meeting yet continue to hold slaves; though many have been manumitted since last year. The case of those who hold them is weightily under care; and a growing concern appears amongst us, that we may more fully attain to clearness respecting this matter."

The following report appears on the minutes of Bucks Quarterly Meeting of the same date, (Eighth mo. 1777.) "We of the committee appointed by the quarterly meeting in order to treat with our members who hold their fellow men in bondage, in conjunction with the several monthly meeting committees, now report, that there hath been a considerable time spent in labouring with them, in order to convince them of the evil of the practice, which labours of love have by some been kindly received, and they have complied so far as to give those they had in bondage their liberty, by instruments of writing given under their hands and seals; but there are others who still persist in holding them as slaves, notwithstanding the repeated care and labour of Friends extended towards them."

Upon turning to the minutes of the monthly meetings composing Bucks Quarter, it appears that at this time there were no slaves held in Buckingham or in Wrightstown monthly meetings; that in Middletown four members persisted in holding slaves, three of whom were afterwards disowned for that offence; and that in the Falls Monthly Meeting, although many had been set free, others were still detained in bondage. These were subsequently emancipated; and it does not appear that more than one member was disowned by that meeting, for refusing to comply with the discipline in this particular.

At the monthly meetings of Salem, held in the Eighth and Eleventh months, 1777, the committee reported two cases of slaves, whose owners were not willing to set them free; and that two girls had been sold for such a number of years, and under such circumstances, as to render their cases little better than slaves. The individual who had made this sale was brought to see its iniquity, and in the First month following, a report was made that one of them was released; but it does not appear that Friends were able to procure the discharge of the other from her purchaser.

The success of these labours is noticed in the minutes of the Yearly Meetings of 1779, 1780 and 1781; and as the minute of 1781 is the last on record upon this subject, which speaks of slaves being still owned by our members, it is probable that before the succeeding Yearly Meeting they had all been freed.

As the Society dwelt under the religious exercise which had been brought over it by the participation of its members in this grievous sin, a concern spread for making reparation to the slaves themselves for their labour;* and for promoting the religious welfare of

* As a specimen of the religious care of Friends in this particular, we select the following case.

A Friend became uneasy respecting the situation of a coloured man who had been set free by his father some years before, but had received no compensation for the time he served after he was twenty-one years of age; and he mentioned the subject to the monthly meeting of Friends of New Garden, Pennsylvania, of which he was a member. At this meeting, held the 7th of Eleventh month, 1778, five Friends were appointed to advise and assist in the case; and in the Third month following, they made a report, which was satisfactory to the meeting, and for aught that appears, to the parties also. The report is in substance as follows, viz.

them and their descendants. In reference to these subjects, the following report of a committee was

“ Agreeably to our appointment, we have several times met and considered the case committed to us, respecting the uneasiness mentioned by T. W., concerning the negro formerly possessed by his father, and having carefully inquired into the circumstances, do find that W. W., about 16 years ago, set free from a state of slavery the said negro named Cæsar, on condition that he would behave himself justly and honestly, and also that he would lay up, or deposit in his, or some other safe hand, the sum of three pounds yearly, that in case he should be sick or lame, he might not be chargeable to his said master’s estate. In consequence of the said condition the said Cæsar had laid up forty-two pounds, which appears to us to be his just property, and all the heirs of W. W. who are arrived at full age, (except one, who resides in Virginia,) cheerfully agree to let him have it. But as the said Cæsar informs us that he has no present use or necessity for the said money, he agreed to have it deposited in the hands of J. P., and proposed to advise with him, when any occasion occurred for applying it; with which we were well satisfied.

“ It also further appears that said Cæsar served his said master in the capacity of a slave, something more than ten years after he was twenty-one years of age; and upon careful inquiry, we find he was tenderly used during said time, and nursed in the small pox, which he had very heavily, and it was long before he recovered; so that we have reason to believe it took at least one year to defray the expense thereof. These things, the said Cæsar fully acknowledges; and further informs that his said master allowed him sundry privileges during said term, whereby he made for himself at least five pounds a year, beside being well clothed and accommodated.

“ After considering all the circumstances of his case, we are unanimously of the mind, that the further sum of five pounds a year, for the nine years he was in usual health, ought to be allowed him out of the said estate, which the heirs now present and of age, also agree to; and it is agreed with the said Cæsar’s free consent, to be deposited with the other sum.

“ And as the instrument of writing by which the said W. W. declared the said Cæsar free, is conditional, and we apprehend not sufficient to secure his freedom, the heirs aforesaid have executed a manumission suited to the occasion.

“ Third month 6th, 1779.”

adopted, and sent down to the subordinate meetings by the Yearly Meeting of 1779.

“ A committee being appointed to review the several accounts now sent, of the labour which hath been extended to fulfil the advice given last year, for promoting the religious instruction of those negroes who have been set free, and their offspring, and for assisting and advising them in their temporal concerns ; and if any further matter occurred to them to be necessary to animate Friends to a continuance of care in this weighty affair, to propose it, in order that our religious duty to that long oppressed people may be fully discharged, made a report in writing, which being several times read and duly considered, is unitedly approved, and recommended to the care of quarterly, monthly and preparative meetings, in order that Friends may be conscientiously concerned to discharge their Christian duty in the weighty matters recommended ; and to send an account to the meeting next year, how this pious work goes forward. The report being in substance nearly as follows.

“ Agreeable to our appointment, we have deliberately considered the reports brought up from the several quarters, and find that an increasing concern for the real good of these people, appears to take place, there being but a small number detained in bondage within the compass of our Yearly Meeting. Under a thankful sense of Divine favour in opening the hearts of many, and making way for the deliverance of these poor captives, we feel a tenderness for those who are continued by any among us in bondage, and are renewedly confirmed in judgment, that where fervent, close labour remains to be ineffectual, our testimony

for the cause of truth and righteousness should be held up by monthly meetings, and they proceed to clear themselves of this iniquitous practice.

“We are united in judgment, that the state of the oppressed people who have been held by any of us, or our predecessors, in captivity and slavery, calls for a deep inquiry and close examination, how far we are clear of withholding from them, what under such an exercise may open to view as their just right, and therefore we earnestly and affectionately intreat our brethren in religious profession to bring this matter home, and that all who have let the oppressed go free, may attend to the further openings of duty.

“A tender Christian sympathy appears to be awakened in the minds of many who are not in religious profession with us, who have seriously considered the oppressions and disadvantages under which those people have long laboured; and whether a pious care extended to their offspring is not justly due from us to them, is a consideration worthy our serious and deep attention; or if this obligation did not weightily lay upon us, can benevolent minds be directed to any object more worthy of their liberality and encouragement, than that of laying a foundation in the rising generation for their becoming good and useful men? remembering what was formerly enjoined, ‘If thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee, then thou shalt relieve him; yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee.’ Lev. xxv. 35.

“Under a fervent concern that our Christian testimony respecting this exercising subject may spread, and fasten on the minds of Friends generally, we ear-

nestly recommend a close attention to former advices, and particularly that of last year ; and that quarterly and monthly meetings may be encouraged to a continued care for the instruction of these people in schools, and in the principles of the Christian religion."

These meetings were not slack in performing the duties to which they were thus called. In all of them, as far as appears, committees were appointed, and funds provided to assist the free people of colour with their advice, and to secure the education and religious instruction of their children. Religious meetings were frequently appointed for them, and are reported to have been held to good satisfaction ; and these labours are continued to be noticed on minute for many years subsequent to this period.

In the Eighth month, 1779, a committee of Chester Quarterly Meeting report "that considerable progress has been made in assisting and advising such negroes as have been restored to freedom ; and are continued to give them their advice on all occasions, particularly to instruct them in the principles of the Christian religion, and the pious education of their children," &c.

In the Second month, 1789, the same meeting says, "the consideration of the temporal and spiritual welfare of the Africans, and the necessary instruction of their offspring being now resumed, and after some time spent thereon, it is closely recommended to our several monthly meetings to pay due attention to the advice of the Yearly Meeting on this subject, and proceed as strength may be afforded, in looking after them in their several habitations by a religious visit ; giving them such counsel as their situation may require," &c.

In the Eighth month, 1798, the monthly meeting of

Concord, (a branch of Chester, now Concord Quarterly Meeting,) reported that a visit had been paid to nearly all the families of the black people, as well as to some single persons of the same colour residing within the limits of their meeting, by a committee, to a good degree of satisfaction.

The minutes of Burlington Quarterly Meeting, exhibit the same care in appointing committees and religious meetings. As a specimen of these minutes; "several of the committee appointed to attend the meeting at Crosswicks for the religious benefit of the black people, report their attendance, and that the meeting was large, satisfactory and encouraging." The same minute provides for the appointing of other meetings of the same character. In the Eighth month, 1785, "one meeting informs that two Friends having each set a slave at liberty, expressed a desire to make a proper allowance for the time they were continued in their service, after they came of age; after divers times deliberating thereon, Friends to whose care such cases had been referred, advised that the sums should be ascertained by indifferent persons; and one of the negroes being deceased, the sum adjudged due in that case, should be divided and paid to the next of kin, as in cases of intestates' estates; which advice the Friends have readily accepted, and have taken measures to carry into effect."

"In Haddonfield Quarterly Meeting, a committee was kept steadily under appointment for several years to assist in manumissions, and in the education of the negro children. Religious meetings were frequently held for the people of colour; and Haddonfield Monthly

Meeting raised on one occasion £131, for the education of negro children.

In Salem Monthly Meeting, frequent meetings of worship for the people of colour were held by direction of the monthly meeting; funds were raised for the education of their children, and committees appointed in the different meetings to provide books, place the children at school, to visit the schools, and inspect their conduct and improvement.

Meetings for Divine worship were regularly held for people of colour, at least once in three months, under the direction of the monthly meetings of Friends in Philadelphia; and schools were also established at which their children were gratuitously instructed in useful learning. One of these, originally instituted by Anthony Benezet, is now in operation in the city of Philadelphia, and has been continued under the care of one of the monthly meetings of Friends of that city, and supported by funds derived from the voluntary contributions of the members, and from legacies and bequests, yielding an income of about \$1000 per annum. The average number of pupils is about sixty-eight of both sexes.

While the Society was thus performing its duty to the free people of colour, within its own limits, a concern began to spread for the extinction of the slave trade and slavery itself; and from this time forward memorials and remonstrances on these subjects were repeatedly laid before persons in power and the public at large. The first notice of this extended concern which occurs on the records of the Yearly Meeting, is contained in the following minutes of 1785, 1786, 1787.

“Some lively, instructive remarks were made, on

what appears further becoming a right concern for promoting justice being done to the African race, as well as their instruction in the principles of Truth ; and faithfully labouring to improve every opportunity for urging to those in power, the moral and Christian necessity of suppressing the cruel traffic in those afflicted people, so grossly unchristian, and reproachful to humanity.”

“The deeply affecting concern on account of the continued traffic in some parts of this continent in the persons of our fellow men, the people of Africa, afresh reviving, and the minds of many Friends being warmly animated with a sense of its interesting import ; it is renewedly and with much earnestness recommended to the diligent attention and care of the Meeting for Sufferings, that no proper means may be omitted, nor any opportunity lost, whereby the testimony of Truth in this matter may be advanced, and the cause of mercy and equity promoted and strengthened in the minds of men generally.”

“On a renewed consideration of the iniquity of the slave trade, it is afresh recommended to the watchful attention of our Meeting for Sufferings in particular, and to Friends individually, that no opportunity be lost of discouraging the unrighteous business, and manifesting to the world, the religious ground of our Christian testimony against this public wickedness.”

The history of the abolition of slavery within the limits of New England Yearly Meeting, is marked with the same features of cautious, yet steady perseverance, which are traceable in the foregoing narrative. In its earlier stages, it follows, at an interval of a few years, the course pursued with us ; while the holding

of slaves was there made a disownable offence, five or six years before it was so regarded in Pennsylvania.

The earliest notice on the subject, is a query sent in the Second month, 1716, by the monthly meeting of Dartmouth to Rhode Island Quarterly Meeting, asking "whether it be agreeable to Truth, for Friends to purchase slaves, and keep them term of life?" This was referred for consideration to the different monthly meetings composing that quarterly meeting. Nantucket Monthly Meeting promptly decided by a minute of Ninth month, 1716, as the sense and judgment of that meeting, "that it was not agreeable to Truth for Friends to purchase slaves, and keep them term of life;" Dartmouth, "that the buying and selling of slaves is inconsistent with Truth;" some others, "that no more slaves be brought from foreign parts," &c. The subject was brought by Rhode Island Quarterly Meeting before the Yearly Meeting of 1717, which notices "that a weighty concern rested on the minds of Friends on account of importing and keeping slaves," but made no decisive minute on the subject.

Although it is evident from the result, that the concern on this subject was spreading among Friends, throughout the Yearly Meeting, no further notice of it occurs on the minutes till the year 1760, excepting a short minute of the year 1727, censuring the practice "of importing negroes from their native country and relations." In 1760, the discipline was revised, and the following passage, taken from the printed epistle of the London Yearly Meeting of 1758, was incorporated into it. "We fervently warn all in profession with us, that they carefully avoid being any way concerned in reaping the unrighteous profits of that iniqui-

tous practice of dealing in negroes and other slaves; whereby in the original purchase, one man selleth another as he does the beast that perishes, without any better pretension to a property in him than that of superior force, in direct violation of the gospel rule, which teaches every one to do as they would be done by, and to do good unto all; being the reverse of that covetous disposition, which furnishes encouragement to these poor ignorant people to perpetuate their savage wars, in order to supply the demands of this most unnatural traffic, whereby great numbers of mankind, free by nature, are subjected to inextricable bondage; and which hath often been observed to fill their possessors with haughtiness and tyranny, luxury and barbarity; corrupting the minds and debasing the morals of their children, to the unspeakable prejudice of religion and virtue, and the exclusion of that holy spirit of universal love, meekness and charity, which is the unchangeable nature, and the glory of true Christianity. We, therefore, can do no less than with the greatest earnestness impress it upon Friends every where, that they endeavour to keep their hands clear of this unrighteous gain of oppression."

In the same year the following query was adopted. "Are Friends clear of importing negroes, or buying them when imported; and do they use those well, where they are possessed by inheritance or otherwise; endeavouring to train them up in the principles of religion?"

Nine years afterwards, (1769,) the Friends of Rhode Island Quarterly Meeting, being uneasy with this query, which allowed of the holding of slaves, called the attention of the Yearly Meeting to the sub-

ject. The application was referred to a committee, who reported, "that having met, and entered into a solemn consideration of the subject, they were of the mind that a useful alteration might be made in the query referred to; yet apprehending some further Christian endeavours in labouring with such who continue in possession of slaves should be first promoted, by which means the eyes of Friends may be more clearly opened to behold the iniquity of the practice of detaining our fellow creatures in bondage, and a disposition to set such free who are arrived to mature age; and when the labour is performed and report made to the meeting, the meeting may be better capable of determining what further step to take in this affair, which hath given so much concern to faithful Friends; and that in the mean time it should be enforced upon Friends that have them in possession, to treat them with tenderness; impress God's fear on their minds; promote their attending places of religious worship; and give such as are young, so much learning, that they may be capable of reading." This report was adopted by the meeting, and a large committee appointed to visit such Friends throughout the Yearly Meeting, as are concerned in keeping slaves, and endeavour to persuade them from the practice.

The next year (1770,) the following query was incorporated into the discipline, "Are Friends clear of importing, buying, or any ways disposing of negroes or slaves; and do they use those well who are under their care, and not in circumstances, through nonage or incapacity, to be set at liberty? And do they give those that are young such an education as becomes Christians; and are the others encouraged in a religious

and virtuous life? And are all set at liberty that are of age, capacity, and ability suitable for freedom?" The subordinate meetings were directed by minute to take due care that this query be complied with.

The next year the committee of 1769, reported that they had completed their service, "and that their visits mostly seemed to be kindly accepted. Some Friends manifested a disposition to set such at liberty as were suitable; some others not having so clear a sight of such an unreasonable servitude as could be desired, were unwilling to comply with the advice given them at present, yet seemed willing to take it into consideration; a few others manifested a disposition to keep them in continued bondage."

It is stated in the epistle to London Yearly Meeting of the year 1772, that a few Friends had freed their slaves from bondage, but that others "have been so reluctant thereto that they *have been disowned* for not complying with the advice of this meeting."

In 1773, the following minute was made. "It is our sense and judgment, that Truth not only requires the young of capacity and ability, but likewise the aged and impotent, and also all in a state of infancy and nonage among Friends to be discharged and set free from a state of slavery, that we do no more claim property in the human race, as we do in the brutes that perish."

It appears by the epistles that the subject was weightily before the Yearly Meeting in 1774, 1775 and 1776; and in 1777 a committee was appointed to aid subordinate meetings in labouring with individuals for effecting the discharge of all who were held in bondage. This committee reported the next year that

most of the slaves were manumitted in the presence of the committee ; and that encouragement was given to hope that all would be set at liberty. In 1782, the Yearly Meeting states, “we know not but all the members of this meeting are clear of that iniquitous practice of holding or dealing with mankind as slaves.”

The object for which Friends had so long and patiently laboured, being thus attained, a concern was introduced into the Yearly Meeting in 1783, for a proper and equitable settlement *for their past services*, between our members who had owned and manumitted slaves, and those so manumitted ; and it was recommended to the quarterly meetings to appoint committees to labour for the accomplishment of this object ; “and also to encourage those who have been held as slaves in a religious and virtuous life.”

In 1784, it was concluded that where any Friends refuse to comply with the advice of the quarterly meetings’ committee in this respect, they report the case to the monthly meetings, and if the refusal still continue to be persisted in, after tender care and labour on the part of such meeting, that they be dealt with as “disorderly walkers.”

Although disownment was thus authorised, the object was gained without resorting to it in any case ; and in the year 1787, the Yearly Meeting states that the effecting of a satisfactory settlement for the past services of those who had been held in slavery was brought to a close.

It appears that previously to the year 1759, the Yearly Meeting of New York had manifested its disapprobation of the slave trade, and that a query, “whether Friends were clear of importing or pur-

chasing negroes or slaves, was regularly answered by the subordinate meetings.

In the records of Purchase Quarterly Meeting, we find the following minute. Fifth mo. 2nd, 1767. In this meeting the practice of trading in negroes or other slaves, and its inconsistency with our religious principles was revived; and the inconsiderable difference between buying slaves or keeping those in slavery we are already possessed of, was briefly hinted in a short query from one of our monthly meetings, which is recommended to the consideration of our next Yearly Meeting, viz. "If it is not consistent with Christianity to buy and sell our fellow men for slaves, during their lives, and their posterity after them, then whether it is consistent with a Christian spirit to keep those in slavery we have already in possession, by purchase, gift, or any other way?" It does not appear from minutes of the Yearly Meeting what notice was taken of this application.

The minutes of Purchase Quarterly Meeting manifest a continued exercise on the subject, by repeated injunctions to the monthly meetings to enforce the discipline in regard to it, and to send up regular accounts of their proceedings therein.

The first minute of the Yearly Meeting on this subject, which we have seen, is dated in 1771, being as follows: "This meeting, taking into consideration the state of negroes being kept in slavery, do now conclude that those Friends that have negroes shall not sell them to others for slaves, excepting in cases of executors, administrators or guardians, who are in that case to advise with their respective monthly

meetings therein, if attended with difficulty, giving to the said meeting the state of the case."

At the same meeting, a minute in relation to keeping slaves, communicated by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, was read, and copies thereof sent to the several quarterly meetings. The meeting also appointed a committee "to visit them that have slaves, and see if there can a freedom be obtained for them that are suitable for it; and such as are not set free, suitably instructed and provided for."

The committee made report in the following year "that they had attended to that service with satisfaction in their minds, and met with some encouragement therein." The same meeting issued an epistle to its members, exciting them 'to faithfulness in supporting our Christian testimony against selling and buying negroes.' The meeting of 1774, "taking under a weighty and solid consideration the matter in regard to those Friends that buy or sell negroes, or otherwise dispose of them, so that after they come to the age of eighteen or twenty-one, according to their sex, they or their posterity are kept in bondage, shall be treated with as disorderly persons; and unless they are brought to a sense of their error, and set such at liberty, the monthly meeting they belong to, shall testify against them."

The next year, quarterly and monthly meetings were directed to appoint committees to investigate the condition of those held in bondage. In 1776, the reports from the inferior meetings state that considerable service had attended the endeavours of the committee, and the meeting renewed its injunction to the quarterly and monthly meetings as last year, to visit

those Friends who continue these poor people in bondage, and labour with them for their release; and that if any are so far unmindful of the sense and judgment of the Yearly Meeting, &c., that they be informed that Friends can have no unity with them, whilst in that state, so far as to employ them or accept of their services in the church, or receive their collections. It was also recorded as the sense and judgment of the meeting, that no Friend should do any thing whereby the right of slavery is acknowledged. From the minutes of the next year it appears that a considerable number of slaves were in consequence set free, although some members were unwilling to comply with the advice of their Friends. At the same Yearly Meeting it was directed, that those who still continued "these poor people in bondage, should be revisited; and if any are so unmindful of the sense and judgment of the Yearly Meeting, as to refuse to comply with the advice of their Friends, that the respective monthly meetings to which they belong deal with such as disorderly persons; and unless they comply with the advice of the monthly meetings, by setting their negroes of every age free, such are to be testified against."

The answers to the queries from this time, state the care exercised by meetings in these respects; and it is evident that very few slaves were now left among Friends. A solitary one is reported in 1784, another in 1785; and in 1787, the quarterly meetings state that no Friends are concerned in negroes, as slaves.

In the Yearly Meeting of 1781, the propriety of compensating the slaves for their services was brought into view, by a minute of Westbury Quarter, and the

meeting advised the appointment in each monthly meeting, "of a number of solid, judicious Friends, in order to perform a visit to such Friends as have set any of those people free; and likewise to the negroes who have been set free, and inspect into the particular state and circumstances of such negroes, and afford them such advice and assistance, both in respect to their spiritual and temporal good, as may be in their power, and endeavour to find what may in justice, remain due to them." At the succeeding Yearly Meeting, it was directed "that the sum or sums which may appear due to such negroes, be retained in the hands of Friends setting them free, to be handed out to said negroes, as they may stand in need of it, under the inspection of standing committees appointed by the monthly meetings for that purpose."

So faithfully and earnestly did Friends carry out these views of the Yearly Meeting, that in the year 1784, there appear to have been but three unsettled cases remaining.

The course pursued by Friends of Virginia Yearly Meeting, living in the heart of a slave country, and surrounded by influences the most unfriendly to the great work of emancipation, was marked by the same features of patient perseverance as were the proceedings of the other Yearly Meetings.

The first step taken by the Yearly Meeting of Virginia, was the adoption in 1757 of the following query, designed to forbid the trafficking in slaves. "Are Friends clear of importing or buying negroes to trade on; and do they use those well which they are possessed of by inheritance or otherwise, endeavouring to

train them up in the principles of the Christian religion?"

The Yearly Meeting of 1764, advises Friends who are possessed of negroes, impartially to consider their situation, and as the reports from the quarterly meetings state that there is a general deficiency in most places in instructing them in the principles of the Christian religion; it is the weighty concern of this meeting earnestly to recommend to the quarterly and monthly meetings, to have that unhappy people more immediately under their care and notice; and that they not only advise their masters and mistresses to use some endeavours towards their education, but also make a diligent inspection into their usage, clothing and feeding, earnestly advising that their state and station may more and more become the particular care and concern of each individual."

In 1766, the propriety of forbidding its members to purchase any more negroes, was proposed to the Yearly Meeting, and the subject referred to the quarterly meetings to consider and report their judgment.

At the next Yearly Meeting (1767,) the matter respecting negroes being again resumed, "it appears that Friends cannot at this time unanimously conclude upon issuing any injunctions, either with regard to purchasing or setting them free; it is therefore left under the consideration of Friends till next Yearly Meeting, to be then re-considered; and in the mean time each individual is earnestly desired to be very careful not to incumber himself or his posterity by any further purchases of them, but to be weightily concerned for the removal of such a burthen and inconsistency from our Society," &c.

The subject was renewed in 1768, and the following rule of discipline agreed upon. "The subject in regard to negroes being brought before this meeting, and duly and weightily considered, it appears to be the sense of the meeting, and accordingly agreed to, that in order to prevent an increase of them in the Society, none of our members for the time to come, shall be permitted to purchase a negro or other slave, without being guilty of a breach of discipline, and accountable for the same to their monthly meeting."

The Yearly Meeting of 1773, issued the following advices to its subordinate meetings. "It is our clear sense and judgment, that we are loudly called upon in this time of calamity and close trial, to minister justice and judgment to black and white, rich and poor, and free our hands from every species of oppression, least the language made use of by the Almighty through his prophet, should be extended to us; "The people of the land have used oppression and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy; yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully, therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; their own way have I recompensed upon their own heads, saith the Lord God.' We do, therefore, most earnestly recommend to all who continue to withhold from any their just right to freedom, as they prize their own present peace and future happiness, to clear their hands of this iniquity, by executing manumissions for all those held by them in slavery, who are arrived at full age, and also for those who may yet be in their minority,—to take place when the females attain the age of eighteen, and the males twenty-one years. And we

believe the time is come when every member of our religious Society who continues to support, or countenance this crying evil, either by continuing their fellow creatures in bondage, or hiring such who may be kept in that state, should be admonished and advised to discontinue such practices."

The same meeting recommends to Friends, "seriously to consider the circumstances of these poor people, and the obligation we are under to discharge our religious duties to them, which being disinterestedly pursued, will lead the professor of Truth, to advise and assist them on all occasions, particularly in promoting their instruction in the principles of the Christian religion, and the pious education of their children; also to advise them in their worldly concerns, as occasions offer; and it is advised that Friends of judgment and experience may be nominated for this necessary service, it being the solid sense of this meeting, that we, of the present generation, are under strong obligations to express our love and concern for the offspring of those people, who, by their labours, have greatly contributed towards the cultivation of these colonies, under the afflictive disadvantage of enduring a hard bondage; and many amongst us are enjoying the benefit of their toil."

In 1780, the Yearly Meeting directed that the members who continued in the practice of holding their fellow men in bondage, should be particularly visited and laboured with; and recommended the appointment of committees for this purpose.

From the reports made to the succeeding Yearly Meeting, that of 1781, it appears that the labours of

the committees appointed to visit those who held slaves, had been nearly completed, and had produced a good effect. At the same meeting, quarterly and monthly meetings were advised "not to employ in the affairs of the church any members who continue to hold their fellow creatures in bondage, after such labours of love have been extended to them."

A person not professing with Friends, having been appointed executor to a Friend's estate, had sold some negroes, and two members, heirs of the deceased, had purchased them. The case being represented to the Yearly Meeting of 1781, it was recorded as the unanimous judgment of the meeting, that notwithstanding motives of humanity may have induced such purchases, yet they being contrary to our discipline, monthly meetings ought to receive no acknowledgment, short of the purchaser's executing manumissions for said negroes; also to continue it under their care, that the remaining heirs do not receive any part of the money arising from the said sales.

The minutes of the succeeding years, 1782 and 1783, manifest the deep concern which prevailed on this subject. In 1784, the quarterly meetings reported that notwithstanding most of those members who held slaves had been visited and laboured with in love and tenderness, yet some of them do not discover a disposition to do that justice to these people, which we are fully persuaded is their natural right. Monthly meetings were therefore directed to extend such further care and labour, as they apprehended would be useful; and where these endeavours proved ineffectual, were authorised to disown the individuals.

In 1785, the following query, was adopted; "Do any Friends hold slaves; and do all bear a faithful testimony against the practice; endeavouring to instruct the negroes under their care in the principles of the Christian religion, and teach them to read?"

In 1787, "it appearing by the accounts that some in membership with us, still hold slaves; that some hire, and others are employed in overseeing slaves, in consideration of which inconsistent practices it appears to be the unanimous judgment of the meeting, that it is high time for us, as a people professing Truth, to bear a faithful testimony against these things;" meetings were therefore exhorted to enforce the discipline in these particulars.

In this manner, by patient and continued exertion, the Yearly Meeting of Virginia gradually cleared itself of this grievous burden to all rightly concerned Friends.

The foregoing narrative is an instructive example of the manner in which the great Head of the Church disposes the hearts of his people to fulfil his gracious purposes. The evil practice of slaveholding had gained, before they were generally awakened to a sense of its iniquity, a footing among a people united in the bands of Christian brotherhood, and called upon, as they believed, to maintain the cause of universal righteousness. Those among them who were from

the first convinced of its sinfulness, and who were themselves clear thereof, did not cease to proclaim its unlawfulness and its inconsistency with a high religious profession. Yet was this Christian zeal tempered with Christian prudence and forbearance. They sought to conciliate and to convince those whom they saw to be in error. Year by year did they exhort and labour with their brethren, and the opposition of men urged to actions which conflicted with their imagined interests, while it did not slacken their zeal, did not excite them to harsh or intemperate expressions. Their course was marked by discretion, no less than by perseverance. They sought first to persuade their brethren to abstain from trafficking in human flesh, and after more than half a century of persevering labour, they effectually gained their cause.

The feelings and sentiments of the Society at large had, in the mean time, been greatly changed, and the enormous sinfulness of slaveholding was so generally admitted, that few were found to defend it. Yet a practice which had prevailed for many generations; in which men of influence and authority partook; into which many had fallen by inheritance from their ancestors; of which the enormity was in most cases veiled by the mildness of the authority; which the complex relations of civil life involved at times in questions difficult to be resolved; a practice thus deeply rooted, could not at once, by a common consent, be abandoned.

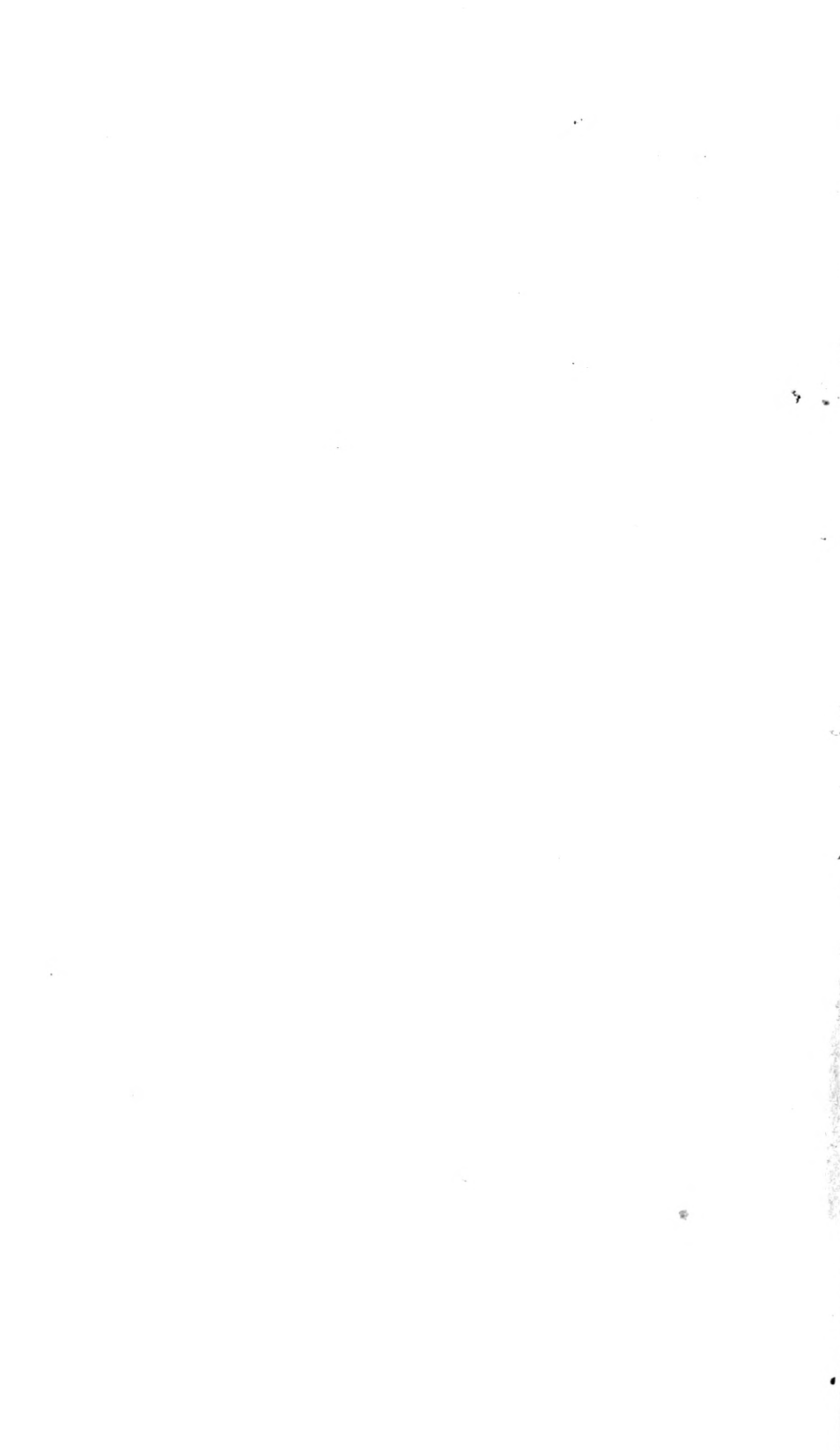
More than twenty years again elapsed before the Society was prepared to disown the slaveholder; and more than a quarter of a century before it could say

there was no slave within its borders. At the same time there spread a conviction that justice required it to compensate the slave for his labours; to provide for the instruction of the young, the care of the infirm and aged, and the assistance and advice of those in active business.

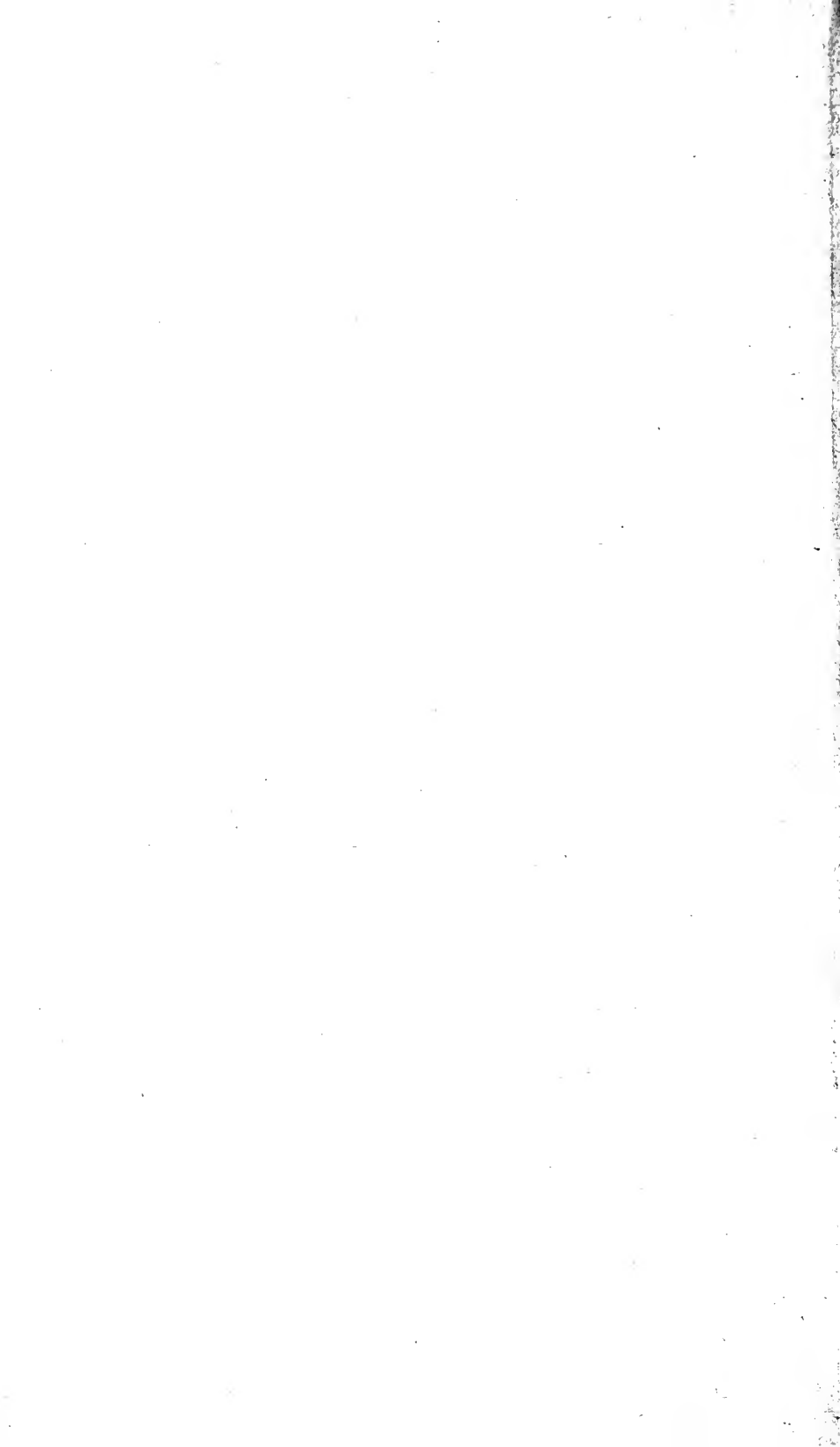
It was not till all these duties were performed, and this debt of justice had been paid, that the Society felt itself called upon to plead the cause of the slave before the world, and to remonstrate with the rulers and the people against the iniquity of the slave trade, and the wickedness of slaveholding; the first memorial to the general government having been presented by the Yearly Meeting of Pennsylvania, about two years after the extinction of slavery within its own limits.

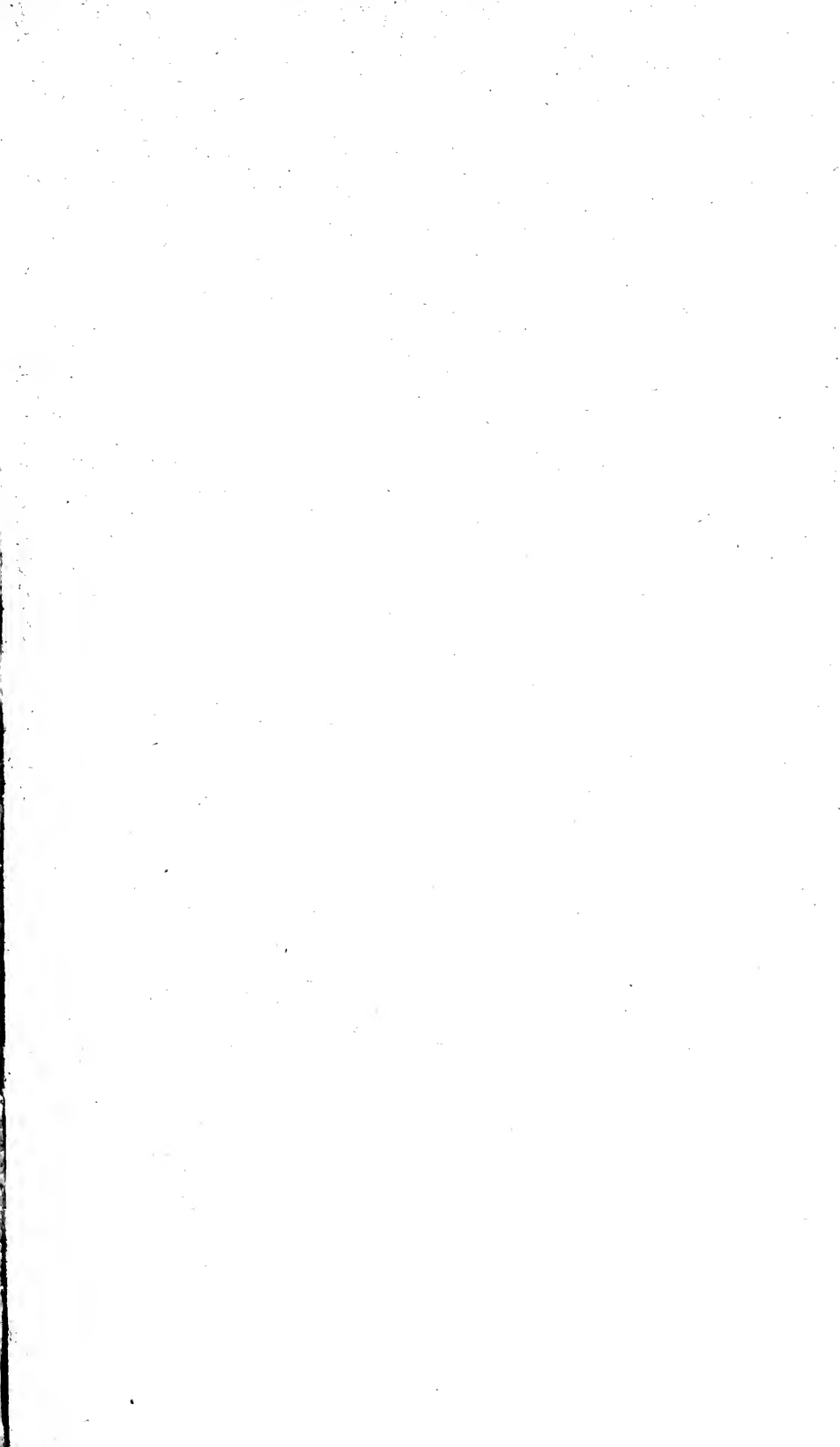
From that period to the present time, the Society has continued to labour with diligence and perseverance, in this righteous cause; endeavouring to enlighten the public mind respecting the enormities of the slave trade and slavery; to prepare the way for the extinction of these foul blots upon the Christian name, and to ameliorate the condition of the free people of colour. Memorials have frequently been presented to Congress and other legislative bodies, with a view of forwarding these important objects, and numerous treatises, calculated to promote sound Christian views respecting them, have been published and widely disseminated; besides various other measures which, from time to time, have been presented as proper and right to engage in. And there is abundant cause thankfully to acknowledge, that as Friends have endeavoured to keep a single eye to their holy Leader, and simply fol-

low his requirings, having no other aim but to advance his glory and the good of their fellow creatures, it has often pleased him to open the hearts of those they have addressed, to receive their admonition or remonstrances, and to bless their humble endeavours.









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